

## Comparative Media Studies

Established as a graduate program in AY2000, Comparative Media Studies (CMS) infuses study of contemporary media (such as film, television, or digital systems) with a broad historical understanding of older forms of human expression. The program embraces theoretical and interpretive principles drawn from the central humanistic disciplines of literary study, history, anthropology, art history, and film studies and aims for a comparative synthesis that is responsive to the distinctive emerging media culture of the 21st century. Students in the program are taught to explore the complexity of our media environment by learning to think across media and to see beyond boundaries imposed by older medium-specific approaches to the study of audiovisual and literary forms.

The comparative and cross-disciplinary nature of both the graduate and undergraduate programs is embodied in a faculty drawn from the Anthropology; Foreign Languages and Literatures (FLL); History; the History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art; Literature; Music and Theater Arts (MTA); Philosophy; Writing and Humanistic Studies (WHS); Science, Technology, and Society; Media Arts and Sciences; Political Science; and Urban Studies and Planning programs. Approximately 25 faculty members teach subjects in CMS.

The graduate program consists of a two-year course of study leading to a master of science degree. The program aims to prepare students for careers in fields such as journalism, teaching and research, government and public service, museum work, information science, corporate consulting, media industry marketing and management, and educational technology. Our recent graduates are working in fields such as higher education, teaching, journalism, photojournalism, and at media and technology consulting firms and media production companies. The undergraduate program, formally approved by the Institute's faculty as an interdisciplinary major in 2008, mirrors the graduate program in concept and ambition and has been experiencing steady growth since its inception. As in the past, CMS has an impressive roster of funded research projects and outreach activities.

In 2009, the program reached a turning point. After 10 years of building an international reputation as a paradigm-setting program for 21st-century media studies, after acquiring millions in research support and constructing a robust research culture, after building one of the largest undergraduate enrollments in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS) and a highly competitive graduate program, and after a full roster of cross-Institute endeavors and internationally visible outreach activities, CMS was still unable to grow beyond its initial two full time faculty members. As a result, it lost professor Henry Jenkins, its founder and one of its two directors/faculty members. Now reduced to one full time director/faculty member, the program is in a period of transition. Graduate admissions have been frozen for AY2010 and AY2011 while the program regroups, rehires, and moves to Building E15. The undergraduate program continues unaffected by this transition.

## Research

### Themes

CMS research themes cross academic disciplines and involve both traditional and emerging communications media, establishing a focus for public presentations, research agendas, and curricular initiatives. The primary research themes are:

- Convergence culture—understanding the new media landscape
- The education arcade—pedagogical potentials of computer and video games
- Informed citizenship and the culture of democracy
- Global culture and media
- Media in transition
- Transforming humanities education

These research themes infuse our academic program, help to shape our outreach activities, and attest to our commitment to bridging disciplines within the Institute and between the Institute and the world. The themes find tangible form in the research projects described below.

### Projects

The Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab (<http://gambit.mit.edu/>) is a five-year research initiative that addresses important challenges faced by the global digital game research community and industry, focused on identifying and solving research problems using a multidisciplinary approach that can be applied by Singapore's digital game industry. The initiative, funded by Singapore's Media Development Authority, builds collaborations between MIT students, faculty, and staff and their counterparts in Singapore, who bring a range of competencies, including technical skills, conceptual design, art creation, and game design, to translate research into small, polished, playable games. Sister laboratories in Cambridge and Singapore facilitate the necessary multidisciplinary interaction, creative exchange, and agile software development among GAMBIT's international researchers, students, and developers.

GAMBIT recently won the grand prize in Microsoft's 2008 global Dream-Build-Play Challenge with Carneyvale: Showtime and had three games, Carneyvale: Showtime, Backflow, and Picopoke, named as finalists in the Independent Games Festival. These projects and others—including research on the use of games in business schools, the development of games that are playable by the blind, and the exploration of emotion and metaphor in games—have led GAMBIT to be featured in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *EDGE*, *Wired*, *boING boING*, the *Onion*, MIT's *Technology Review*, *USA Today*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Gamasutra*, and *Kotaku*, and on 1up.com, the Discovery Channel, MTV, and CNN. GAMBIT's researchers, developers, and students have presented their work at SIGGRAPH, the Game Developers Conference, FuturePlay, Media in Transition, Indiecade, the Pictoplasma Exhibition, the FROG conference, the Foundations of Digital Games conference and the Independent Games Festival, and have contributed essays to such peer-reviewed publications as *ACM Transactions on Graphics*, *Computer Graphics Forum*, *the Symposium on Computer Animation*, *Eludamos: the*

*Journal for Computer Game Culture*, and *The Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures*. GAMBIT's researchers have also contributed chapters to the edited anthologies *The Game Design Reader*, *The Video Game Theory Reader*, *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, and *Well Played: Video Games, Value and Meaning*. Collaborator Nick Montfort published *Racing the Beam: the Atari Computer Game Platform* with co-author Ian Bogost, which launched the Platform Studies series with MIT Press in early 2009. Researcher Jesper Juul will publish his second book with MIT Press, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and their Players*, in fall 2009.

The MIT Center for Future Civic Media (<http://civic.mit.edu/>) was established in 2007 as a joint effort between the MIT Media Lab and CMS, bridging two established programs at MIT—one known for inventing alternate technical futures and the other for identifying the cultural and social potential of media change. Funded by a four-year grant from the Knight Foundation, the center is developing technical and social systems for sharing, prioritizing, organizing, and acting on information to support the flow of news in local communities. Examples include developing new technologies to support and foster civic media and political action, serving as an international resource for study and analysis of civic media, and coordinating community-based test beds both in the US and internationally. The center hosts weekly research meetings at MIT, periodic community dinners and forums, and the annual Knight News Challenge winners' conference in June.

The Education Arcade (<http://www.educationarcade.org/>) seeks to identify the pedagogical potential of games as a medium and to find ways to use games for learning both in and outside of the classroom. This year, the Education Arcade completed work on its Learning Games to Go initiative, with support from Maryland Public Television through a grant from the Federal Star Schools program. *Lure of the Labyrinth*, an online game for middle school math and literacy learning targeted toward underserved populations, went online in January, and has been enthusiastically greeted by teachers in its test market. The Education Arcade continued to explore questions surrounding high schoolers' use of social networking, games, and new media in their academic studies. This research, sponsored by NBC News, informed NBC's development of iCue, a suite of online learning tools and games that give students access to NBC archives as a supplement to their advance placement studies. Also, in the past year, the Education Arcade explored using games to promote compassion and altruism as part of Children's Hospital Boston's Generation Cures initiative, completed the design phase of a social networking game intended to teach English to Spanish speakers in conjunction with the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Open Language Learning Initiative, and, with a grant from the National Science Foundation, started to create a series of multiplayer games and videos that engage students with issues of data and data collection.

HyperStudio, directed by principal research associate Kurt Fendt, successfully completed the project "Tories, Timid, or True Blue?" designed for high school history education and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). This collaboration with Boston's Old North Foundation also created tools for history scholars to investigate Old North's rich archive of original documents dating back to 1724. The second online version of the project "US-Iran Relations" is currently being released to

US and Iranian scholars and policy makers. HyperStudio applied for NEH funding for two projects with SHASS faculty: the “Comédie-Française Registers Project,” in collaboration with history professor Jeffrey Ravel, universities in Oxford and Paris, and the Comédie-Française; and the “Serial Experience” project on Victorian serial novels, in collaboration with literature professor James Buzard, professor Joe Childers at the University of California at Riverside, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. HyperStudio organized a number of StudioTalks on digital humanities topics. For 2010, HyperStudio is planning an international digital humanities conference titled Changing Media, Changing Humanities.

Project New Media Literacies (NML, <http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/>), sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation, explores participatory culture with an eye toward identifying the social and cultural skills that we think young people should learn and be given the chance to practice in order to successfully navigate a contemporary media culture. It is our belief that young people need both to make and reflect upon media and in the process, acquire important skills in teamwork, leadership, problem solving, collaboration, brainstorming, communications, and creating projects. NML is developing a range of materials, including interactive learning challenges that offer teens a rich variety of ways to explore and practice skills needed in the new media culture, a series of teachers’ strategy guides designed to show the fit between media literacy principles and traditional school content, and a case book for media ethics (in collaboration with Harvard’s Project Zero). NML is part of a larger initiative that MacArthur has launched to explore social and educational opportunities in the new media landscape, in coordination and collaboration with other researchers at Indiana University; Global Kids; Common Sense Media; the University of California, Berkeley; and the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

The Convergence Culture Consortium (C3, <http://www.convergenceculture.org/>) includes as its corporate partners Turner Broadcasting, MTV, and ad agency GSD&M, as well as Brazilian partners Petrobras and Internet Grupo. C3’s mission is to track new ways of storytelling, advertising, and branding; analyze them; and examine how they can be placed in a larger artistic and commercial context. The project’s team members have authored a series of white papers, operated a project-related blog, and hosted a highly influential annual conference on the topic of media convergence titled Futures of Entertainment. The consortium continues to attract new members and to generate significant interest from the public and industry alike.

## **Fundraising**

In AY2009, CMS continued to benefit from fundraising success of prior years. This success was due to our sustained focus on developing large-scale and long-term research projects and gifts. We increased research volume, mainly due to our MIT-Singapore GAMBIT Game Lab contract that authorized even greater funding for AY2009. We continued to hold several large conferences to disseminate information. We produced papers, books, and media projects to enhance public outreach and access. We fully funded all graduate students who were able to participate in the research as part of their education, and we staffed the research initiatives with talented and skilled personnel.

GAMBIT received its third installment of \$2.6 million to continue researching and creating games. The program moved forward with increased staff, several faculty-led research projects, and the second year of a successful summer program in which more than 40 Singaporean students resided in Cambridge to work and study with MIT students, faculty, and staff.

The Center for Future Civic Media saw a significant gain in productivity by increasing its research and staff considerably after an initial ramp up period and after receiving its second installment of \$1.25 million. This year the center hired more research and technical staff, resulting in more research projects and better execution of existing research. Knight Challenge fellows were also brought to work with the students and staff. Four CMS students were assigned to the center and a part-time communications manager was hired.

Phase two of Project New Media Literacies received its third installment of the \$1.8 million committed over three years. This year the project solidified its research, worked with Harvard's Good Play project, maintained existing staff, further developed the Learning Library with a subaward to Platform Shoes, and attended many conferences to disseminate its findings.

C3 signed on two new international members from Brazil as well as maintaining three existing members bringing our total fundraising for this project to date to \$1,360,000. We also continued to charge admission for the annual Futures of Entertainment conference, filling a unique niche in the field and generating publicity for the consortium.

The Education Arcade continued to benefit from the \$550,000 multiyear Star Schools grant as part of its ongoing collaboration with Maryland Public Television as well as continuing its research for NBC on its new educational tool, iCue. They received a total of \$811,795 for this research. The Education Arcade has been successful in fundraising for other design research initiatives, but due to changes at CMS, new projects will be administered through the Department of Urban Studies and Planning.

CMS received the third \$100,000 installment from an anonymous donor who pledged \$500,000 over five years in support of the program. The new fund supported two and a half graduate students, two of whom are international and could only attend CMS if they received full funding. Students continued to benefit from the professional development fund set up to allow them to attend conferences that furthered their thesis research and professional development.

This year, CMS held the second Julius Schwartz Memorial Lecture, which featured J. Michael Straczynski. The Julius Schwartz Memorial Fund, established several years ago, has become self-sustaining as a result of revenues received from this lecture.

The fund, recognizing outstanding media productions by CMS undergraduates, graduates, and the MIT community, was established in honor of longtime CMS program administrator Chris Pomiecko. The fund continued to grow, with an annual endowment income of almost \$1,000.



The Greg Shaw Technologist in Residence Fund—an endowment fund established by Greg Shaw, an electrical engineering and computer science alumnus and early supporter of CMS—continues to support new technologists, including a communications manager and a computer support technician.

Gerald Katell, an MIT alumnus and CMS Advisory Group member, continued payment on the \$1 million pledged to endow the Gerald L. Katell (1962) Fellowship and Education Fund in Comparative Media Studies. The funds help support our programmatic needs such as lectures and conferences.

### **Governance**

Until June 2009, CMS had two directors: Peter de Florez professor of humanities Henry Jenkins (Literature and CMS) and professor William Uricchio (Literature, FLL, and CMS). Following Professor Jenkins's departure, Professor Uricchio remains as director. The program is under the auspices of three humanities programs: Literature, WHS, and FLL. Administratively, CMS is housed in Literature. The program is governed by a steering committee jointly chaired by Professors Jenkins and Uricchio. Other committee members for AY2008 were department heads James Buzard, Literature; Isabelle de Courtivron, FLL; James Paradis, WHS; and Janet Sonenberg, MTA. A faculty committee, composed of all affiliated teaching and research faculty, also guides CMS.

### **Staffing**

CMS slightly increased staffing levels in AY2009. The majority of staff positions were funded by CMS-sponsored research revenues. We hired a communications manager, Andrew Whitacre, who splits his time between CMS and the Center for Future Civic Media. The MIT-Singapore GAMBIT Game Lab hired an audio director, Abe Stein. Project New Media Literacies hired a postdoctoral associate, Russell Francis, for nine months, and replaced project manager Kelly Whitney with a project associate, Jessica Tatlock. We hired lecturer Catherine D'Ignazio to teach our Workshop class while Nick Montfort was on leave and we hired Glorianna Davenport as a lecturer in the spring to teach one of our Media and Methods classes. We also hosted several visiting scholars and students, including Martijn de Waal, Matthew Gaydos, and Kristine Jørgensen.

### **Postdoctoral Program**

The CMS postdoctoral program recruits younger scholars and media makers to support both teaching and research activities. Continuing appointments were awarded to Joshua Green (Australia), working in the areas of creative industries and convergence culture and Doris Rusch (Austria), working in the area of games. Other postdoctoral appointments included Kristine Jørgensen (Norway), working in the area of games; Russell Francis (UK), in new media education; and Esteban Ollé (Spain), in creative industries.

### **Graduate Program**

During AY2009 there were 22 students enrolled in the CMS graduate program, which offers a master of science degree. Of this group, 15 were women and three were international students from India, Costa Rica, and Iran. Twelve students will receive

degrees in 2009. CMS graduate student Madeline Elish received the 2009 Anthony Sun Fellowship Award to pursue international internships this summer through the MIT International Science and Technology Initiative. Madeline used this fellowship to explore the intersection of art, science, and technology at the Medialab-Prado in Madrid, Spain.

No students were admitted to the graduate program for AY2010.

Graduates of the CMS master's program have worked at companies such as HBO, Midway Studios, Razorfish, Etsy.com, Deloitte Consulting, Nickelodeon, PBS, NPR, WHERE, and Greenovate, in positions such as creative strategist, game designer, television producer, documentary filmmaker, and project manager. Others have gone on to PhD programs at such schools as Duke University; the University of Southern California, the University of California, Los Angeles; and the University of Wisconsin, Madison; as well as MIT's Program in Science, Technology, and Society. Graduates are now in faculty positions at Simon Fraser University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. For more information on the CMS graduate program, see [http://cms.mit.edu/academics/graduate\\_program.php](http://cms.mit.edu/academics/graduate_program.php).

### **Undergraduate Program**

In its first academic year as a permanent major, the CMS undergraduate program grew to 22 majors. Of this group, 10 were women and 13 were minority. Four students will graduate in 2009, which brings the number of students who have graduated from the CMS undergraduate program from its inception as an experimental major in 2003 through 2009 to 41. As of June 2009, CMS had 12 minors and 51 concentrators. CMS graduates have gone on to careers in global digital commerce, video game production, marketing, and graphics and social networking software design at companies such as Nike, Electronic Arts, Microsoft, Google, Pipeworks Software, and the *Congressional Quarterly*; others have pursued studies in theater arts or law. Undergraduate involvement in CMS research continues to be strong. During AY2009, CMS sponsored 49 Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) positions for pay or credit, and another eight students will participate in summer UROPs. For further information about the CMS undergraduate program, see [http://cms.mit.edu/academics/undergrad\\_program.php](http://cms.mit.edu/academics/undergrad_program.php).

### **Events and Programs**

CMS maintained a high level of outreach activities with numerous lectures, conferences, and other activities. Where possible, these events (as well as our colloquia and Communications Forum lectures) were recorded and podcast by way of our website. Most of the research groups also have active and well-trafficked blogs.

### **Colloquia and Conferences**

This year's weekly colloquium series included "Comics and Social Conflict" with Diana Tamblin, who is writing a biography of Canadian arms trader and weapons engineer Gerald Bull; Ho Che Anderson, who authored *King*, a three-volume biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Jeet Hee, a historian and leading comics scholar; "Tracking Secret Asian Man" with Tak Toyoshima, creator of the comic strip *Secret Asian Man*; "The Design and

Speculative Technology of MST3K” with Mystery Science Theater 3000 creators Joel Hodgson and Trace Beaulieu; “Opening Doors, Building Worlds: The Origins of the X-Men” with creator Chris Claremont; and “The Discipline of Political Messages in an Unruly Era” with Republican political consultant Tucker Eskew.

Other events included the 11th annual CMS Media Spectacle, a competitive showcase of MIT-produced media, and the Julius Schwartz Memorial Lecture with J. Michael Straczynski, creator of *Babylon 5* and screenwriter of Clint Eastwood’s *Changeling*. Prominent among the year’s CMS conferences were the Futures of Entertainment 3, an international conference on media spreadability, audiences and value, social media, and distribution; and “Media in Transition 6: Stone and Papyrus, Storage and Transmission,” an international conference on the future of archives.

### **Communications Forum**

Directed by professor David Thorburn and coordinated by Brad Seawell, the Communications Forum sponsors lectures, panel discussions and conferences on all aspects of technology and communications, public policy, and media in transition. The forum continued its civic media series, co-sponsored with the MIT Center for Future Civic Media with support from the Technology and Culture Forum at MIT. In the fall, John Carroll, Ellen Goodman, and Tom Rosenstiel examined media coverage of the presidential campaign in “The Campaign and the Media, 1,” and Marc Ambinder, Cyrus Krohn, and Ian Rowe undertook a post-election analysis looking especially at the role of new media in “The Campaign and the Media, 2.” The series continued in the spring as Johanna Blakely, David Carr, and Stephen Duncombe discussed “Politics and Popular Culture.” The forum added two installments to its conversations series when noted Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt appeared in “Literature/History/Biography” and Harvard University Library director Robert Darnton appeared in “Books in Libraries in the Digital Age.” A talk on “Film Music and Digital Media” featured Dan Carlin and Paul Chihara and was moderated by MIT’s Martin Marks. A spring panel on “Global Media” with Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Jonathan Gray, Aswin Punathambekar, and Abderrahmane Sissako launched MiT6 (<http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit6/>), cosponsored by the forum and CMS and supported in part by WHS and Literature. For more information about the forum, see <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/>.

### **Honors and Awards**

Professor Diana Henderson was named a MacVicar Faculty Fellow.

Professor Martin Marks was awarded a Levitan Teaching Prize.

Professor William Uricchio was named the Bonnier visiting professor of journalism, media, and communication at Stockholm University.

### **Visiting Scholars**

This year’s visitors helped reinforce CMS’s commitment to cross-cultural approaches to media study. Jesper Juul was awarded a continuing appointment as a visiting lecturer in game studies. Other visitors included visiting scholars Fong-Gong Wu and Yu-Ling



Lu from Taiwan, Martijn de Waal and David Nieborg from the Netherlands, David Finkel and Mia Consalvo from the US, and Qing Li from Canada. Visiting lecturers were Catherine D'Ignazio, Glorianna Davenport, and Chris Weaver, all from the US, and visiting students Jaroslav Svelch from the Czech Republic and Matthew Gaydos from the US.

## **Publications**

The academic and creative work of the faculty members affiliated with CMS appears in more complete form on their departmental reports. Highlights appear below.

Ian Condry, FLL, published *Nihon no hippu hoppu: bunka gurobarizeshon no "genba"* with NTT Publishing in Tokyo, Japan, which is a translation of *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* published by Duke University Press in 2006. Professor Condry and professor Thomas de Frantz also led a group of a dozen MIT students in the MIT Dance Theater Ensemble to perform "Live Action Anime 2009: Madness at Mokuba" at Tokyo University of the Arts in Japan on May 29 and 30, and at Anime Boston at the Hynes Convention Center on May 22.

Professor Martin Marks, MTA, wrote and performed a new score for *The Avenging Conscience*, directed by D.W. Griffith in 1914, for Kino International's new DVD edition of the film.

Professor Jay Scheib, MTA, was ranked the number one director in New York by the critics of *Time Out New York* and profiled by *American Theater Magazine* as one of the 25 theater artists in America who will shape the next 25 years of American Theater. Last year Scheib's new opera *The Making of Americans*, based on the novel by Gertrude Stein, premiered at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and his recent multimedia performance work *Addicted to Bad Ideas* was presented at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, the Luminato Festival in Toronto, and the Helsinki Festival in Finland.

Professor Irving Singer, Philosophy, continued to republish his oeuvre with MIT Press, including *Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film*; *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up*; *The Nature of Love: vol. 1: Plato to Luther*, with a new preface by the author; *The Nature of Love: vol. 2: Courtly and Romantic*, with a new preface by the author; and *The Nature of Love: vol. 3: The Modern World*, also with a new preface by the author.

William Uricchio published *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

### **William Uricchio**

**Director**

**Professor of Comparative Media Studies**

More information about Comparative Media Studies can be found at <http://cms.mit.edu/>.